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SUBJECT: FRENCH PREVIEW OF GAERC: CROATIA, BURMA, MIDDLE
EAST, SRI LANKA, AND MORE

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Greg D'Elia, Reasons 1.4 b, d
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11. (C) SUMMARY: On April 24, French MFA Deputy Chief for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Mathieu Carmona previewed the April General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting's discussions on Croatia, Burma, the Middle East, Sri Lanka, follow-up from the U.S.-EU Summit including Iran, as well as Ukraine, Moldova, and Durban II. Carmona acknowledged a lack of substance in the GAERC agenda despite its length. On Croatia, foreign ministers will discuss the European Commission's proposals to negotiate an end to Slovenia's blockage of the remaining 12 chapters. Burma will yield no surprises, as participants will renew the EU's Common Position. Carmona said the EU is missing an opportunity to influence the Government of Israel's policy review on the peace process by producing no conclusions. He could not predict details of the discussion on Sri Lanka, as ministers will have to take into account possible developments over the next few days. Informal follow-up of the U.S.-EU Summit in Prague will include a conclusion calling on Iran to choose engagement over isolation. The upcoming Eastern Partnership Initiative (EPI) and Southern Corridor meetings will also be discussed. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Croatia: Carmona said movement on unblocking Croatia's entrance into the EU is as important for France as for the United States. He stressed that much progress towards decoupling the border dispute with Slovenia from Croatian EU accession was the result of French proposals taken on by the European Commission. He said the foreign ministers await responses in early May from Slovenia and Croatia regarding an agenda for negotiation and a system of arbitration. Carmona expressed hope that Slovenia will lift its blockage at that point, rather than require full resolution of the border issue, which would make further progress possible during the Czech presidency. Carmona acknowledged a second motivation for Croatian accession: it is a requirement for adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, as concessions the EU agreed to with Ireland following the failed Irish referendum were codified in Croatia's accession package.

13. (C) Burma: The foreign ministers will issue conclusions renewing the EU's Common Position and sanctions, given Burma's lack of progress. He said the 2010 elections' best outcome would be to give the opposition more voice, which the EU will promote through dialogue with ASEAN. Carmona added that the Commission is looking for new tools to deal with Burma, as the international community's current policy has

borne no fruit.

¶4. (C) Middle East: Participants will discuss recent developments, including statements by President Obama and Israeli PM Netanyahu, as well as the April 22 meeting of the Political and Security Committee with Special Envoy George Mitchell. Carmona said no conclusions would be published due to Czech opposition, which France views as a lost opportunity to highlight EU concerns prior to PM Netanyahu's trip to Washington, which Carmona said was the most important piece of the GOI's ongoing policy review of the peace process. He defined those concerns as the need to reopen Gaza border crossings for the long term and halt the construction of Israeli settlements. Carmona said France will encourage the Commission to find concrete ways to reinforce with Israel its opposition to colonization, as the settlement issue could torpedo the entire peace process. The GOF sees potential for progress this year, especially as the Arab peace initiative will not be on the table forever.

¶5. (C) Sri Lanka: Carmona highlighted recent French activity at the UN focused on the government's obligation to protect civilians. He added that the exact nature of the discussion would depend on developments over the next few days, including G8 discussions.

¶6. (C) At lunch, the foreign ministers are expected to review informally the U.S.-EU Summit in Prague, including its outcomes on Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iran. State Secretary for European Affairs Bruno Le Maire, who will represent France at the GAERC while FM Kouchner accompanies

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President Sarkozy on a state visit to Spain, will speak on Iran. A formal conclusion requested by Italy will support President Obama's opening to Iran, and call on the Iranians to choose cooperation over isolation. The statement will also add that time is limited, and Carmona said the UNGA next fall will likely take stock of progress and discuss consequences if necessary.

¶7. (C) Ukraine: The Germans, and to a lesser extent the Poles, insisted that Ukraine be added to the agenda. Carmona said France's viewpoint was that establishing political consensus among Ukrainian leadership in order to ensure the disbursement of the second tranche of the IMF's Stand-by Arrangement was the key to addressing Ukraine's economic crisis. Carmona said France agrees with Germany that the EU must encourage Ukraine to take these steps, particularly in light of pressures from Russia.

¶8. (C) Moldova: At Romania's request, Moldova is on the agenda. France's goals are to de-escalate tensions between Moldova and Romania, and for the EU to help promote political dialogue within Moldova. Carmona criticized Moldova's decision to require visas for Romanians, which discriminates against a single member state of the EU, violating the Visa Facilitation Agreement.

¶9. (C) Durban II: Carmona said Sweden requested discussion of Durban II, which France and Sweden agree was a qualified success, particularly as the declaration was adopted as negotiated. Carmona stressed that the participation "until the end" of most EU states allowed them to insist on European red lines, including no anti-Israeli or anti-defamation of religion language. He said EU participation had allowed the insertion of language supporting the freedom of expression and calls for an "end to impunity" (citing specifically Sudanese President Omar Bashir), albeit at the cost of a call for an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation, dropped by EU states during the negotiations. Carmona said France views the EU's main failure regarding Durban II as the lack of full participation by all 27 member-states, which Carmona blamed on the Czechs "throwing in the towel" but also shows differences within the EU on Middle East issues.

¶10. (C) Upcoming Meetings: Finally, the Czech Presidency will give updates on preparations for upcoming Eastern Partnership Initiative and Southern Corridor meetings. Acknowledging that Lukashenka was a dictator who plays off the West and Russia, he said shutting out Belarus would hand the country to Russia. Citing Ukraine's development and political independence from Russia as an example of the benefits of EU engagement, Carmona said France supported the invitation, while hoping Lukashenka will not attend.

PEKALA